



## Distribution of Groundfish Disaster Funds

**O**n Sept. 12, 2012, the Department of Commerce determined that a commercial fishery failure due to a fishing resource disaster would exist in the “Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery” for the 2013 fishing year in the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York.

As part of the 2014 fiscal year budget, Congress approved \$75 million in fishery disaster aid, of which about \$33 million will be distributed to the states affected by the Northeast groundfish disaster.

The fishery directors from these states, in partnership with NOAA Fisheries, recently announced a consensus plan to distribute the disaster funds. The following Q&A is intended to address some of the many questions fishing industry members may have about how the disaster aid program will work.

**Q:** How will the groundfish money be distributed?

**A:** The consensus plan funds several key components developed by the state directors and industry “to restore the fishery or prevent a similar failure in the future and to assist a fishing community affected by such failure.”

It splits the \$32.8 million into thirds – roughly \$11 million in each – and allocates approximately: one-third for direct assistance to qualifying fishery participants; one-third to be split among the states to support efforts to address the unique and varied needs of each states’ fishing communities; and one-third to be held in reserve for development of a federally funded buyout or an industry-funded buyback.

**Q:** How much money will each state receive?

**A:** Under this plan, approximately one-third, or roughly \$11 million, will be set aside for the potential development of a government-led buyout program or to support an industry-funded buyback program. The remaining two-thirds, approximately \$22 million, would be divided among the six states as follows:

- Connecticut – \$250,000;
- Massachusetts – \$14,512,618;
- Maine – \$2,260,034;
- New Hampshire – \$2,039,825;
- New York – \$814,012; and
- Rhode Island – \$1,938,617.

**Q:** How were the state shares determined?

**A:** The money will be allocated to the states based on an agreed-to formula that considers groundfish revenue losses affecting each state in recent years, with a slight adjustment to ensure that no state receives less than \$250,000.

The money allocated for direct assistance to limited-access permit holders is based on the number of Northeast multispecies permit holders who declared homeports in each state. The states will use the money allocated to them to directly pay qualifying permit holders that are homeported in their state.

**Q:** How much of this money is actually going to fishermen?

**A:** Virtually all of the money, minus minimal

administrative fees, is going to the fishing industry. Two-thirds of the money will go to support the fishing industry in the near-term, either in the form of direct assistance to individual fishermen or to support state-directed efforts designed to address the unique and varied needs of each states’ fishing communities.

For instance, states may opt to use monies to assist groundfish for-hire fishermen, vessel crew, state permit holders, shore-based businesses like ice companies and seafood dealers and processors, or to fund cooperative research programs. The rest of the funds will be used either to develop a buyout or a buyback program for the fishing industry.

**Q:** Who do I call if I have state-specific questions about either direct assistance or state-directed grants?

**A:** Each state fishery agency has designated a contact person as follows:

- Maine Department of Marine Resources – Meredith Mendelson at (207) 624-6553;
- New Hampshire Fish and Game – Cheri Patterson at (603) 868-1095;
- Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries – Melanie Griffin at (617) 626-1528;
- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management – Robert Ballou at (401) 222-4700, ext. 4420;
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Division of Marine Resources – Steve Heins at (631) 444-0436; and
- Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection – Mark Alexander at (860) 434-6043.

**Q:** How much overhead will the federal government and states take for administrative purposes?

**A:** The amounts will be reduced by a Fiscal Year 2014 Hollings budget reduction (0.1%) as required by Congress. Other than this small reduction, NOAA Fisheries does not anticipate taking any federal overhead to distribute these funds. States will take a small percentage of the funds to administer the grant programs. For further information on state overhead, please contact your state fishery agency.

**Q:** When will the money be available to the states?

**A:** We expect states may be able to distribute funds within six months. Each state will have to develop and submit “spend plans”/grant applications to NOAA for approval of the funds for both the direct assistance and state-directed grants.

For the direct assistance portion of the funds, we already have shared a list of eligible permit holders with each of the states, which may help expedite the development of these spend plans.

Once we receive state spend plans and grant applications, we will try to process and approve them as quickly as possible. However, a number of steps are required before the state grants can be distributed.

Once a complete spend plan/grant application is developed and submitted, we have to go through the federal grant process to ensure that statutory and grant requirements are addressed. This typically takes two to

three months to complete.

### Direct assistance

**Q:** How much will each fisherman who receives direct assistance get?

**A:** For the direct assistance portion of the funding, potentially 336 limited-access Northeast multispecies permit holders who have landed at least 5,000 pounds of regulated Northeast multispecies groundfish in any of the past four fishing years, beginning with fishing year 2010 (May 1, 2010–April 30, 2011) through fishing year 2013 (May 1, 2013–April 30, 2014), each will receive approximately \$32,500.

The states may adopt additional requirements that must be met before a disbursement can be made. For instance, even if an individual meets the initial federal requirements, he could be disqualified if he/she has not paid state taxes.

**Q:** How were the eligibility criteria for direct assistance determined?

**A:** Several commercial fishery industry groups recommended potential criteria to the six states and NOAA Fisheries for consideration. One of the industry groups’ stated objectives was to develop a regional spending plan to ensure consistency in the treatment of active fishing businesses affected by the disaster and to ensure that those who received payment were dependent on groundfish.

The goal was to issue a uniform payment across vessel size class, state, and sector boundaries to spread out the direct assistance as quickly as possible across the fishery without the complications and delays that would be incurred in determining actual adverse impacts on each limited-access Northeast multispecies permit holder.

It was recognized that these funds would not “make whole” any one owner for their declines in fishing revenues. A number of the permit holders who had larger declines in fishing revenues agreed to this approach.

Based on these recommendations and other considerations, this plan was agreed to by state directors and NOAA Fisheries. State directors and NOAA Fisheries also discussed the option of assisting others who did not qualify for direct assistance through the state-directed grant funds.

**Q:** Why are you counting only groundfish landings and not landings of other commercial species caught by federal limited-access Northeast multispecies permit holders?

**A:** The disaster determination was based on the decline of the groundfish fishery and the effects of that decline. For that reason, it was agreed that the direct assistance funds should go to help as many fishermen as possible who, in recent years, were actively fishing for groundfish and primarily dependent on groundfish for their livings.

**Q:** Why did you base landings for qualifying permits on fishing years rather than calendar years?

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# The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

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**A:** Fishing year vs. calendar year was used for determining qualifying permit eligibility for disaster assistance because that is the way the Northeast multispecies fishery is managed and monitored.

**Q:** Why doesn't more money go as direct assistance to fishermen?

**A:** In developing this spend plan, NOAA Fisheries and state directors spent a lot of time talking to industry leaders and members of the fishing community, congressional members, and non-government organizations. State directors also held meetings with their constituents to solicit their ideas and opinions on how funds should be spent.

This three-part approach is an attempt to capture and respond to the diverse viewpoints we heard. Not all fishermen we talked to wanted to receive direct assistance. We heard a range of ideas for how the money should be allocated, including vessel buyouts/buybacks, assistance for shore-based businesses that support the industry, funds to support for-hire fishermen who also target groundfish, and funds for cooperative research.

This plan balances direct assistance for near-term relief but also attempts to develop a long-term capacity reduction program for the future.

**Q:** How do I know if I am eligible for direct assistance?

**A:** We sent letters to all individuals who held a federal limited-access Northeast multispecies commercial groundfish permit or Confirmation of Permit History (CPH) as of April 30, 2014 to let them know if they were preliminarily eligible for a direct assistance payment.

**Q:** If I meet all federal and state requirements, how will the payment be made?

**A:** If you meet all requirements, once disaster funds have been distributed to the states, your payment will be made based on the home state indicated on your fishing year 2013 limited-access Northeast multispecies permit as of April 30, 2014.

If your permit is in a CPH, the payment will be based upon the state listed on the most recent address associated with the CPH.

A person or entity who does not currently own a fishing vessel but who has owned a qualifying vessel that has sunk, been destroyed, or been transferred to another person must obtain a CPH if the fishing and permit history of the vessel have been retained by the owner. Issuance of a valid CPH preserves the eligibility of the owner to apply for a limited-access permit for a replacement vessel in the future based on the qualifying vessel's fishing and permit history.

**Q:** What do I do if I believe an error has been made in determining whether or not I qualify for direct assistance?

**A:** The landings eligibility criteria are based on dealer and vessel trip reports submitted to NOAA Fisheries. If a permit holder thinks there has been an error in landings attributed to the permit, the permit holder may ask us for their catch history information, and we will work with them to resolve the error. If we need to make corrections to the data and this affects a

permit holder's eligibility, he/she will be notified.

To request landings data, permit holders simply need to provide us with their vessel name, permit number, their name, and contact information, ideally an e-mail address and phone number. The request must be signed and dated.

Requests for catch history information may be submitted in one of three ways:

- By mail to APSD Data Request, NOAA Fisheries, 55 Great Republic Dr., Gloucester, MA 01930;
- By fax to (978) 281-9196, Attn: APSD Data Request; or
- By e-mail scanned file to <NMFS.GAR.Data.Requests@noaa.gov>.

**Q:** Is it true that one individual or a corporation could receive multiple checks?

**A:** Yes, it is possible that a person with more than one federal limited-access Northeast multispecies permit may receive multiple checks if the landings associated with each permit meet the landing criteria of 5,000 pounds during the qualifying fishing years.

For instance, if a fisherman owns and fishes multiple vessels, and those vessels all meet the landings criteria, he or she will receive a check for each qualifying permit.

**Q:** What if there are multiple owners of a permit or CPH?

**A:** The check is distributed to the documented owner of the permit/CPH, which may be a corporation. For example, if there are four persons involved in ownership, the check will be made out to the corporate owner, and it will be up to the individuals to divvy up the proceeds as they see fit.

**Q:** What happens if landings were made in part or wholly by a previous owner of a vessel or permit?

**A:** Only the permit holder as of April 30, 2014 will be eligible for the funds. To avoid a potentially complex and contentious process of trying to work out participation and eligibility of prior owners that could significantly delay the distribution of these funds, we felt it was best to grant eligibility only to the owners of a permit as of April 30.

Prior owners are free to reach out to their respective state agency to see if some of the other funds being made available to states to spend for other purposes can be used to assist them.

**Q:** Does the \$32,500 in disaster relief count as taxable income?

**A:** We recommend that fishermen consult with their accountants or other tax experts to answer this question.

**Q:** Do I have to submit a grant application or other paperwork to receive my \$32,500 check?

**A:** You do not need to submit any paperwork to us. Each state will determine what paperwork may be needed for disbursement of the direct assistance funds. This information should be available in the near future. You should contact your respective state fishery agency for further details.

**Q:** What happens if I landed in excess of 5,000 pounds during one of the qualifying years, but I sold my permit?

**A:** If you sold your fishing vessel but retained the

fishing eligibility (Confirmation of Permit History/CPH), you may still be eligible for assistance under the direct assistance portion of the funds.

However, if you sold your permit along with your vessel then you will not be eligible for the direct assistance funds. In this case, you may want to reach out to your respective state fishery management agency to recommend that some of the other state direct grants monies be used to assist people in your situation.

**Q:** Why were open-access handgear permits not included in the direct aid eligibilities if they met the landings threshold?

**A:** NOAA Fisheries and state directors felt active limited-access Northeast multispecies permit holders were those most dependent on the groundfish fishery and, therefore, most affected by the disaster.

Other disaster funds being made available to states may potentially be used to help other fishermen affected by the disaster. Handgear permit holders may want to contact their state agency to see if they may be eligible for assistance under these grants.

**Q:** Do I qualify for direct assistance if I am a groundfish fisherman from a state other than the six that requested the disaster declaration from the Secretary of Commerce?

**A:** The disaster applies to Northeast groundfish. The Northeast multispecies disaster determination was made by the Secretary of Commerce based on requests for this determination from the Governors of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York. Only vessels homeported in one of these states are eligible for the assistance.

However, if you landed fish in one of these states, you should contact the appropriate state to determine if you qualify for assistance through the other state-directed grants.

**Q:** Is there any other opportunity for some assistance if I don't qualify for direct assistance?

**A:** Yes, anyone who may have been impacted by the groundfish disaster who is not eligible for direct assistance may reach out to the state fishery management agency in his/her respective state.

Over the next several months, state agencies will be developing spend plans for another portion of the disaster funds, roughly \$11 million in state-directed grants. This provides an opportunity for commercial and for-hire fishermen and businesses that support these industries to provide input on how these funds should be distributed.

## State-directed grants

**Q:** How much leeway do states have to develop spend plans for use of the other state-directed grants?

**A:** The spend plan can cover a wide range of impacts related to the groundfish disaster. States can address impacts on commercial vessels, for-hire vessels (party and charter boats), crew, support industries such as processors and fish houses, and communities.

For example, funding could be used for direct payments to fishermen, infrastructure projects, habitat restoration, vessel and permit buybacks, and job retraining, among many other uses.

*See DISASTER FUNDS, next page*



# Increases in Monkfish Days, Landing Limits Are Expected to Improve Fishery Revenues

**D**uring the past few years, quotas for some northeast stocks have increased, while others have decreased, sometimes dramatically. Although monkfish quotas will remain the same for the next three years, fishing opportunities will increase under Monkfish Framework Adjustment 8.

Framework 8 is the latest monkfish action developed by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils and approved by NOAA Fisheries. We published a proposed rule for Framework 8 on May 27 and accepted comments through June 11. The final rule for this action was published in early July.

Framework 8 incorporates the results of the latest stock assessment and adjusts quotas and management measures, as necessary, to more effectively achieve the objectives of the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan.

NOAA Fisheries completed a monkfish stock assessment in May 2013. The results of that assessment indicated that both monkfish stocks are above their biomass targets, and the fishing mortality rate is below the levels that would lead to overfishing.

While this is continued good news for the monkfish fishery, the assessment also highlighted some conflicting trends in the data, suggesting that biomass may be overestimated and fishing mortality underestimated in

recent years.

Based on these conflicting trends, the councils opted to maintain existing quotas for another three years as a precaution to minimize harm to monkfish stocks over the long term.

In recent years, the monkfish fishery has not fully harvested its existing quotas. To better achieve yearly catch targets, monkfish days-at-sea (DAS) and landing limits are increased under Framework 8 as follows:

- Monkfish DAS allocated to limited-access monkfish permits increased from 40 to 46, with the number of monkfish DAS that can be used in the Southern Fishery Management Area increased from 28 to 32;
  - Incidental monkfish landing limits for Category C and D vessels fishing under a Northeast multispecies groundfish DAS in the Northern Fishery Management Area were increased;
  - Category C vessels can now land up to 600 pounds tail weight of monkfish for each groundfish DAS used in the Northern Area;
  - Category D vessels can now land 500 pounds tail weight of monkfish per groundfish DAS used;
  - Category A/C vessels fishing on a monkfish DAS in the Southern Area can now land up to 610 pounds tail weight of monkfish per DAS; and
  - Category B/D vessels can land up to 500 pounds tail weight per monkfish DAS used in the Southern Area.
- All of the other landing limits are unchanged.
- Based on industry input, Framework 8 also revises other regulations that unnecessarily restricted fishing operations. Monkfish vessels allocated monkfish-only DAS (monkfish DAS in excess of a vessel's allocation of groundfish Category A DAS) can now use these monkfish-only DAS at any time during the fishing year.



Previously, vessels had to use their monkfish DAS in conjunction with groundfish DAS before they could use their monkfish-only DAS. Also, Category H vessels can now fish throughout the Southern Area instead of being restricted to fishing below 38°40'N latitude.

We expect that this action will modestly increase monkfish landings and associated revenue throughout the fishery. Overall, the measures implemented by this action could increase monkfish revenue by about \$2.3 million compared to existing measures, depending on market price and landing rates.

For more information about these new measures, call Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or e-mail him at <douglas.christel@noaa.gov>.

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## Disaster funds

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**Q:** Could states pass their state-directed grants through to groundfish sectors?

**A:** If states want to work with sectors to develop their spend plans for the state directed grants, they have the ability to do so.

**Q:** Who do I contact to learn more about how the state-directed grants are going to be developed?

**A:** Each state will be developing a grant application and spend plan for the state-directed portion of the funds. NOAA Fisheries will provide some general guidance on the development of these grants, but the states will have a great deal of flexibility to determine how monies should be allocated. To learn more about how to provide input on the development of these grants, please contact your respective state fishery agency.

### Buyback/buyout

**Q:** What is the difference between a buyback and a buyout program?

**A:** Typically, a buyback program is a program developed by the fishing industry according to a process laid out in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. It involves using a Federal loan to buy back permits and/or vessels. Those permit holders who remain in the fishery repay the loan over time.

A buyout program is where the federal or state government purchases permits and/or vessels. Under a buyout, the funds do not have to be repaid.

**Q:** What is the process for developing a buyback program?

**A:** In general, the fishing industry develops a business plan and puts it forward through a referendum for approval. Funds for the buyback would then be leveraged by federal seed money, and the loan would be paid back by the industry through a "tax" on landings. The disaster funds could be used to reduce the amount of landings tax necessary to repay the buyback loan.

**Q:** What are the next steps that the government plans

to take to explore whether or not to implement a buyback or a buyout program?

**A:** NOAA Fisheries will continue to discuss potential buyback or buyout plans with the state directors and industry groups.

**Q:** What is the deadline for designing and implementing a buyback or buyout program?

**A:** There is no specific deadline, but NOAA Fisheries, working with the states and the groundfish industry, would strive to develop an acceptable plan in the shortest time possible.

**Q:** What happens to the money allocated for a buyback/buyout program if none are developed?

**A:** In that event, NOAA Fisheries would discuss potential alternate uses of these funds with the state fishery directors.

For more information, call Allison Ferreira, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, at (978) 281-9103 or e-mail her at <allison.ferreira@noaa.gov>.



## How NOAA Fisheries Calculates Discards

**T**he New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils and NOAA Fisheries set annual catch limits for each fishery and need to be able to monitor the fisheries to see if catches are within target levels so they can adjust catch limits upward or downward as necessary.

During most fishing operations, some fish are discarded at sea. Because discards plus landings make up the total catch, these discards must be accounted for.

In 2010, scientists developed a peer-reviewed method for determining cumulative discards to help estimate discards in the Northeast multispecies groundfish fishery.

Since total catches in this fishery are subtracted from the Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE) of each sector and the common pool, the estimation method is needed to provide sectors and common pool vessels with total catch information to help them avoid exceeding their ACEs. Otherwise, any ACE overage must be deducted from the ACEs allocated the following fishing year.

The cumulative method continually recalculates the discards back to the beginning of the fishing year as more information is received. The method has been extended to other fisheries that require discard/bycatch estimation, including: the scallop fishery for yellowtail flounder discards; the herring fishery for haddock discards; and the longfin squid fishery for butterfly discards.

NOAA Fisheries' Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office staff members also plan to use the method to monitor river herring catch.

### Groundfish example

Under the cumulative discard methodology, how discards are calculated depends on whether there is an at-sea fisheries observer on a fishing trip or not. To explain this, we will use the Northeast multispecies fishery as an example.

On observed trips, if 100% of the hauls are observed, the actual observed discards are applied to the trip. So, landings + discards = total catch for the trip.

If less than 100% of the hauls are observed, the discards from the observed hauls are used to estimate the amount of discards on the unobserved hauls.

On unobserved trips, discards are estimated. The discard estimation process is performed at what is referred to as "the stratum level." A stratum is a way of grouping similar trips. In this process, a stratum is made up of trips by members of the same sector or of trips made by members of the common pool using the same gear type/mesh and in the same stock area.

What is a discard ratio? A ratio compares the size of two quantities. The basis for calculating discards on unobserved trips is the ratio of discards-to-total landings from observed trips within a stratum. This is called the discard ratio.

For example, suppose that on observed trips within the stratum, there were 100 pounds of discards with a landings total of 10,000 pounds. The discard ratio would be:  $100/10000 = 1/100 = 0.01$ .

The discard ratio is multiplied against the unobserved trips' landings to estimate its discards.

### Cumulative method

The method of estimating discards is cumulative. This means that, as more data are reported during the fishing year, discards are re-estimated with updated discard ratios using the most current year-to-date totals.

For example, suppose that additional observed trips within the previous stratum had 200 pounds of discards with a landings total of 10,000 pounds. The discard ratio would be updated to:  $(100 + 200) / (10,000 + 10,000) = 3/100 = 0.015$ .

Depending on how many observed trips have occurred in the stratum, the method for determining the discard ratio for unobserved trips will fall within one of the following stages.

- **Assumed Discard Ratio** – At the beginning of the fishing year, no observed trips have occurred. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries provides an assumed discard ratio. This is based on observer data from the previous year for the same gear and stock.

- **In-Transition Discard Ratio** – For the first four observed trips within a stratum in the fishing year, NOAA Fisheries calculates a transition discard ratio.

After each observed trip, the transition ratio diminishes the influence of the assumed discard ratio in the calculation of discards for that stratum. After four trips have been completed in the stratum, the in-season ratio replaces the assumed and transition ratios.

- **In-Season Discard Ratio** – Starting with the fifth observed trip in a stratum, NOAA Fisheries changes the method to the in-season ratio. This ratio uses discard data from observed trips to estimate discards from unobserved trips. As more observer data become available, NOAA Fisheries updates the in-season discard ratio and applies it to all unobserved trips within that stratum during the fishing year.

### Key points

The following are points to keep in mind about discards.

- Discard ratios are shared across the sector or the common pool. The observed discard patterns of all the vessels in a sector, for example, determine the discard ratios for that sector. All vessels in the sector then share those discard ratios when their discards are computed. This means that permit holders can be charged for discards on unobserved trips, whether a particular stock was caught on a trip or not.

- Discard ratios are computed at the sector/common pool level and applied at the individual trip level.

- A sector manager can summarize total discards any number of ways, including by trip, by permit, or by sector, according to the data management needs of the sector.

- The sum of discards from a sector's observed and unobserved trips equals sector-level discards. The same is true for the common pool.

### Industry concerns

The 2010 peer review noted that the performance of the methodology might be reviewed after several years. In addition, constituents within the multispecies, scallop, and longfin squid fisheries have requested re-evaluation of the methodology to address several

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## New England and Mid-Atlantic RSA Programs: Opportunities for Fishermen and Science

**S**ince 1999, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Regional Fishery Management Councils have developed four Research Set-Aside (RSA) programs to supplement state and federal funding of high priority research to support fishery management efforts.

These RSA programs include Atlantic sea scallops, monkfish, Atlantic herring, and Mid-Atlantic multispecies and have been managed by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP) since 2006.

No federal funds are provided for RSA programs. Instead, funds come from the sale of landings from allocations set-aside by the Councils in these fisheries. The Councils provide the regulatory framework for the RSA programs through their appropriate fishery management plans, and Council committees work to set annual priorities for the research.

Grants for the RSA allocations are awarded through a competitive process. These grants support projects involving researchers from universities and non-profit organizations, commercial and recreational fishermen, and state and federal fishery

management agencies.

The money generated by the sale of the awarded quota funds the research and provides financial compensation for vessels harvesting the RSA quota. This compensation can be in the form of direct fish sales in the commercial fishing industry or additional fishing opportunities in the charter fishing industry.

There are several means of harvesting the set-aside quota. RSA grant recipients may harvest the quota or contract directly with commercial fishing vessels to fish for the allocation.

The Mid-Atlantic RSA also uses an auction process developed by the National Fisheries Institute-Scientific Monitoring Committee to obtain vessels to harvest RSA quota. The NFI auction provides a venue where awarded quota is divided into lots of varying sizes and is made available for fishermen to purchase during an annual bidding event. Vessels fishing for RSA quota often seek federal exempted fishing permits to allow them to fish in more opportune ways than the general fleet, such as through exemptions from trip limits and some seasonal closures.

*See, FISHERMEN AND SCIENCE, page 8*



## New Vertical Line Regulations

### Gear Marking Requirements (trap/pot and gillnet)

Gear marking colors remain the same and are specific to each individual management area. However, the frequency and size of the markings have changed.

Now, all buoy lines must be marked with three marks – one at the top of the line, one midway along the line, and one at the bottom of the line. Each mark must be 12" long.

### New Trap/Pot Closure

A new closure called the "Massachusetts Restricted Area" has been added for trap/pot gear (see Fig. 1). The closure is in effect annually from Jan. 1 through April 30 beginning on Jan. 1, 2015.

### Minimum Number of Traps-Per-Trawl Requirements

In the Northeast, many of the ALWTRP management areas will require a minimum number of traps per trawl based on area fished and distance from shore. For specific management area information, visit the ALWTRP website at <[www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp)>.

### Minimum Number of Traps-Per-Trawl Exemptions

New Hampshire state waters are exempt from the new minimum trap per trawl requirements. However, all other ALWTRP requirements remain in effect.

In Maine, waters within 1/4 mile of Mohegan Island, Matinicus Island, and Ragged Island also are exempt from the new minimum trap-per-trawl requirements, but all other ALWTRP requirements remain in effect.

### New Definition

Definitions for "Maine Six-Mile Line Waters" and "Maine Pocket Waters" were established because these terms are used in relation to the new minimum number of trap-per-trawl requirements.

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concerns, including the following.

- The continual recalculation makes it difficult for harvesters to know where they stand in relation to their sector allocations or overall fishery caps. Some sector managers have suggested that an annual fixed discard rate should be evaluated.
- In the longfin squid fishery, the use of an annual cumulative value causes concern because of the seasonal differences in butterflyfish discard rates. It has been suggested that this fishery might benefit from cumulative rates by season.
- The use of broad area stratum causes concern among scallopers because they find it inconsistent with scallop area management. It has been suggested that the fishery might benefit from separate cumulative rates for smaller areas.

The fishery issues noted above boil down to the same basic concern: We need to evaluate how well the discard methodology supports near real-time, in-season monitoring and decision making and weigh the balance between the risk of premature fishery closures and the risk of exceeding catch allocations.

We are currently archiving weekly catch data and

# Vertical Line Rules to Protect Whales Apply to Trap/Pot, Gillnet Fisheries

On June 27, NOAA Fisheries approved modifications to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) that are intended to reduce the risk of serious injury or death to right, fin, and humpback whales caused by entanglement in vertical lines used in the trap/pot and gillnet fisheries.

Implementation of the changes to the ALWTRP is being staggered to accommodate the needs of the various fisheries. The changes will go into effect as follows:

- Aug. 26, 2014 in the Mid-Atlantic;
- Nov. 1, 2014 in the Southeast; and
- June 1, 2015 in the Northeast.

*Please note: If you fish in waters exempted by the ALWTRP prior to June 27, 2014, the new requirements DO NOT apply to you.*

Specific management area requirements and maps are available on the ALWTRP website at <[www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp)> or by calling NOAA's Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office at (978) 281-9328.

There also have been changes to the Southeast trap/pot and gillnet areas managed under the ALWTRP. For more information, visit the ALWTRP website listed above or call the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office at (727) 824-5301.

NOAA Fisheries has three fishery liaisons on staff to help you understand how ALWTRP rules apply to you. For more information, don't hesitate to contact the fishery liaison in your area:

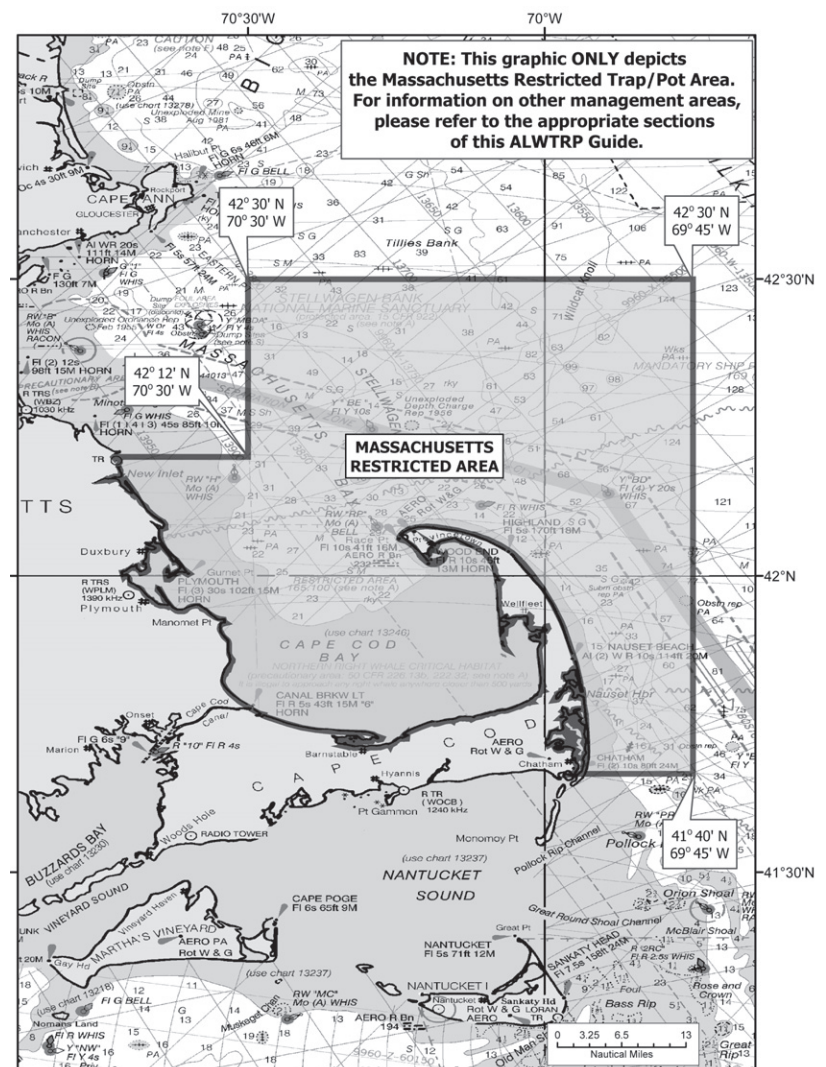
Northeast Fisheries Liaison  
John Higgins  
(207) 677-2316  
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Mid/South Atlantic Fisheries Liaison  
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discard rates produced by the current methodology. This will provide a database that can be used to see how various revised approaches perform in comparison to the current methodology when using the actual information available in near real-time. We hope to conduct a peer review of the results in 2016.

More detailed documents explaining discard calculations are available for the Northeast







# The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

## NCRP Partners Complete 1st Season of Longline Industry-Based Survey

**D**uring the month of May, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP) teamed up with two Cape Cod commercial fishing vessels to successfully complete the first season of a pilot longline survey in the western and central Gulf of Maine.

The intent of the survey is to help fill in information gaps for groundfish and data poor species by sampling hard-bottom areas that are difficult to sample with mobile trawl gear.

This industry-based survey is designed to build upon previous and ongoing cooperative longline sampling efforts. It uses methods and sampling gear consistent with that of the Eastern Gulf of Maine Sentinel Survey Fishery conducted by the Penobscot East Resource Center and the University of Maine's School of Marine Sciences to collect catch and biological data on groundfish and other species.

The F/V Tenacious II and F/V Mary Elizabeth worked closely with NCRP Study Fleet and other Center scientists to sample 45 stations where catches of species of interest were expected to be high. These species included: cusk; wolffish; cod; white hake; thorny, winter, and little skate; halibut; and dogfish. Many of these were among the top 10 species caught during the spring leg of the survey.

Sampling stations included both hard and soft bottom, and efforts were made to be consistent with the coverage of the Center's bottom trawl survey in terms of stations per unit area.

At each site, approximately one nautical mile of gear was set, covering a distance roughly equivalent to that of a bottom trawl survey tow. The industry-based survey



*A commercial fisherman hauls the longline gear during the industry-based survey.*

*Information from this longline survey should help fill information gaps for data-poor species like cusk.*

NEFSC NCRP photos

timing was coordinated with the Center's research vessel Henry B. Bigelow's survey schedule as much as possible to provide complementary sampling that can be compared to information collected from that trawl survey.

This NCRP survey also is intended to increase the understanding of age, growth, and maturity for some of the target data-poor species. Samples obtained through this work for species of concern such as cusk may be particularly helpful in developing proactive conservation measures and informing protected species decisions.

An additional season of sampling will occur in the fall of 2014. These pilot efforts will help refine the survey methodology and inform the Center about the costs and efforts needed to continue a Gulf of Maine longline



survey in the future.

For more information on this project, please e-mail NCRP Director Dr. John Hoey at <John.Hoey@noaa.gov>.

## EFP Access to Closed Areas Enables Collection of Important Information

**T**o help the recovery of depleted groundfish stocks such as cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder, Georges Bank Closed Areas I and II and the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area have been closed to most groundfish fishing for nearly 20 years.

During that time, Georges Bank haddock has become abundant, and sector vessels have requested access to these areas through their sector operation plans so that they may fish on this stock, as well as other healthy stocks.

However, because of the ongoing poor condition of Georges Bank cod and yellowtail flounder, NOAA Fisheries has proceeded with caution in response to sector requests to open these areas.

We exempted vessels from portions of the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area in fishing years 2013 and again in 2014, and have announced our interest in gathering catch data from Closed Areas I and II through exempted fishing permits (EFPs). We are specifically interested in collecting information about haddock catch rates, as well as cod and yellowtail flounder bycatch.

Prior to the start of fishing year 2014, we received two EFP applications, one from the Northeast Fisheries

Science Center's Cooperative Research Program Study Fleet and one from Atlantic Trawlers Fishing Inc. based in Portland, ME. In May 2014, we approved these EFPs, allowing a small number of vessels into portions of Closed Areas I and II.

The Study Fleet is authorized to take up to 10 exploratory trips into portions of Closed Areas I and II during specified times this year: from May to Dec. 31 for Closed Area I; and from May to June 15 and then from Nov. 1 to Dec. 31 for Closed Area II.

Vessels accessing closed areas must use selective trawl gear – Ruhle trawl, haddock separator trawl, or rope separator trawl – and must have a technician on board to collect data such as pounds retained and discarded, tow and gear information, and bottom temperature.

Atlantic Trawlers Fishing Inc. is authorized to use three vessels to fish inside the same closed areas as the Study Fleet during different time periods this year: from May to Feb. 15 for Closed Area I; and from May to June 15, and then Nov. 1 to Feb. 15 for Closed Area II.

In addition to looking at catch composition in

closed areas, these vessels are conducting comparative fishing tows, a minimum of two sets of test tows per trip, using both standard 6" diamond mesh codend nets and 5.1" square mesh codend nets when fishing with a haddock separator trawl or Ruhle trawl both inside and outside the closed areas.

This EFP also allows these vessels to fish outside of the closed areas for the entire fishing year when fishing with 5.1" square mesh codend nets. Vessels must have an at-sea monitor on board, who is paid for by the participating vessels, to collect data similar to that collected by the Study Fleet and also to collect comparative data on the different mesh sizes that are being used, both inside and outside the closed areas.

Data collected under both EFPs could help inform whether to allow conditional access to sector vessels through the sector exemption process. The codend comparison also will help determine whether a 5.1" square mesh codend can increase haddock catch while maintaining low bycatch.

Additionally, information collected during January and part of February could help answer longstanding questions about cod and haddock spawning activity in these areas at this time of year.

For more information, call Brett Alger, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at (978) 281-9153 or e-mail him at <brett.alger@noaa.gov>.

# Part II: Federal Blue Crab Disaster Programs in the Chesapeake Bay

On Sept. 22, 2008, the Secretary of the US Department of Commerce declared that a commercial fishery failure had occurred in the Chesapeake Bay's soft and peeler blue crab fisheries due to a 41% decline in landings bay-wide.

Subsequently, on Nov. 18, 2008, NOAA Fisheries announced that Maryland and Virginia would be eligible for financial aid to assist watermen who had been economically hurt by this commercial fishery failure.

Each state was awarded \$14,995,000 in disaster relief funds to be administered in the form of Federal grants, and each was asked to develop a plan to address the impacts of this commercial fishery failure.

This is the second installment in a two-part series summarizing these plans. The first installment detailed the implementation of six projects by Virginia (see CFN/NOAA Fisheries Navigator June 2014). This time, we'll look at how Maryland has put its disaster aid to work.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for managing the state's blue crab resources and began its program planning phase by holding three meetings with the commercial crabbing and processing industries in May 2008.

It then designed the state's blue crab fishery disaster program around three priority areas, which were to: restructure the fishery; provide new economic opportunities; and restore important habitat for blue crab.

Maryland's program has evolved considerably over the last five years in response to hurdles encountered during implementation, changing priorities identified by the state, watermen, and associated industries, and particularly in response to the rapid pace of change occurring in reporting technologies.

Maryland's projects, grouped by priority area, are detailed as follows.

## Restructuring

- **Restructure the Blue Crab Fishery Through License Buybacks** – This initiative involved collaboration with the Environmental Defense Fund and fishery management experts from around the Bay and the country to evaluate the current licensing and management structure of Maryland's blue crab fishery. It also involved a reduction in the number of latent and possibly active commercial crab licenses in order to ensure a viable fishery that could support full-time watermen.

- **Improved Enforcement** – The goal of this effort was to improve the ability of Maryland's Natural Resources Police to enforce fishery regulations on the water using strategies such as: side-scan sonar to detect unmarked crab pots; saturation patrols; surveillance and covert operations; shoreline inspections; seafood dealer inspections; and crab house and restaurant inspections.

- **Crabmeat Quality Assurance Program** – The University of Maryland and Maryland's crab processing industry partnered to provide quality-control inspections of soft and peeler crabs and processed crabmeat in Maryland to ensure that safe and high-quality crabmeat products are available to Maryland consumers.

This effort also supported investigation into new processing methods, such as improved techniques to remove shell pieces from crabmeat, and an innovative and safe packaging design to keep Maryland's industry competitive in the global seafood marketplace.

- **Blue Crab Harvest Accountability Pilot Program** – This initiative emerged out of a start-up electronic reporting program that began in 2009 with considerable

input and support from some watermen.

It focused on using recent technological innovations to develop and improve a cost-effective harvest reporting process, including verification, while increasing participation and developing

## GARFO Has a New Website Address

We recently changed our name to the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) to better convey the broad extent of our region, which spans from Maine to North Carolina.

To reflect this new name, we have changed our website address. You can now find us online at <[www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov)>.

Please note: Users going to the old website address <[www.nero.noaa.gov](http://www.nero.noaa.gov)> will automatically be redirected to the new website address.

recommendations for fishery-wide implementation. This program has proven so successful that the DNR has made full-scale implementation throughout the fishery a high priority.

- **2013 Blue Crab Pilot Accountability Study: The Roving Dockside Monitoring Program** – This ongoing effort has four objectives: to complement expansion of the electronic reporting project; to enhance the performance of roving monitors; to work with industry partners to evaluate the potential of limiting offloading locations; and to develop recommendations for fishery-wide implementation.

## New opportunities

- **Oyster Aquaculture Training and Education** – In hands-on field and classroom settings, commercial crabbers learned about profitable shellfish farming, best management practices, and current Maryland aquaculture laws and regulations.

The fundamentals covered during the training included: hatchery operations; seed production; nursery operations; data collection and analysis for growers; management of oyster grounds for profit; predator control techniques; and other skills.

- **Oyster Aquaculture Infrastructure Grants** – Grants were offered to watermen "certified" under the oyster aquaculture training and education program in all of the Maryland counties where shellfish aquaculture may become a viable business opportunity. These grants offer affordable loan financing to start or expand shellfish aquaculture businesses.

- **Watermen Heritage Tourism Training Program** – The goal of this project was to provide Maryland watermen with a means to supplement their annual fisheries income by giving them the knowledge, skills, abilities, and connections to participate in or develop heritage and geo-tourism businesses associated with Maryland's history, environment, and maritime heritage, especially the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Blue crab disaster funds provided tuition to individuals to participate in a training program and to give them the tools needed to join Maryland's growing tourism industry.

- **Packaging Equipment Upgrade for Processors** – Funds were provided to crab processors to upgrade their operations with innovative crabmeat packaging equipment such as cryogenic freezer and vacuum

packing systems needed to produce value-added products with a longer shell life that could result in new markets and higher economic value.

- **Seafood Marketing Program for Blue Crabs** – The goal of this effort was to improve the market for Maryland commercial crabbers and processors. It focused on a public relations and advertising program inside and outside of Maryland and on marketing products developed using the innovative packaging upgrade tools previously described.

- **Feasibility Study for Composting Crab Waste from Processors** – Disposing of crab "chum" has long been a challenge for the crabmeat processing industry, and a successful crab waste composting facility might improve the bottom line for crabmeat processors in Maryland. So, the DNR contracted with Maryland Environmental Service to conduct a study of the feasibility of successfully composting crab waste generated in Dorchester County. Investigators assessed the feasibility of various technologies to process crab chum in an environmentally friendly manner and to successfully market the end product.

- **Shellfish Aquaculture Financial Support** – The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation and the DNR collaborated to make affordable, subsidized loans available to commercial watermen and others wishing to start or to expand shellfish aquaculture operations through the Maryland Shellfish Aquaculture Financing Fund.

- **Crab Processing Automation Project** – This initiative revived an unfunded crab automation project begun in 2011 by Maryland Sea Grant and the DNR. Its intent was to improve crab processing with modular automation and to determine the economics of its operation. Automated sensors and other devices were to be used to "size" crabs and direct various cutters to disassemble the crabs to the point where manpower would be required primarily to inspect and pack crabmeat into containers.

## Habitat restoration

- **Oyster Bar Habitat Rehabilitation Projects** – The goal of this project was to expand work programs employing commercial crabbers to restore oyster bar habitats. Targeted oyster bars mapped with sonar were surveyed by divers to provide a better understanding of bottom conditions and to enable determination of the most effective rehabilitation strategy.

- **Derelict (Ghost) Pot Removal Program** – Commercial crabbers participated in the retrieval of derelict crab pots from targeted areas within the Bay guided by a side-scan-sonar database, which indicated areas of the greatest concentration of derelict pots.

- **Oyster Recovery and Habitat Creation in the Upper Chesapeake Bay** – The objectives of this project were: to increase oyster populations on Upper Chesapeake Bay bars to help restore important ecological functions, including water filtration and nutrient cycling, add aquatic reef community structure, including valuable habitat for blue crabs and finfish species, and add brood stock to augment regional populations; to measure planting success and ecological benefits through monitoring assessment and reporting; and to provide future opportunities for watermen to resume harvest in historic harvest areas.

These projects will be completed this year, and approved final reports will be available to fishermen and the general public on our website at <[www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/grantfactsheets](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/grantfactsheets)>.

For more information, call Deirdre Kimball, NOAA Fisheries, at (978) 281-9290 or e-mail her at <[deirdre.kimball@noaa.gov](mailto:deirdre.kimball@noaa.gov)>.



# New Measures for Scallop Permit Holders

**O**n June 16, NOAA Fisheries published new measures that set specifications for the FY 2014 scallop fishery, including days-at-sea (DAS) allocations, individual fishing quotas, and sea scallop access area trip allocations.

This action also: allows scallop pounds that went unharvested in the Closed Area I Access Area in 2012 and 2013 to be landed in a future year; gives full-time scallop vessels the option to exchange their allocated 2014 Delmarva Access Area trip for five DAS; and includes measures to reduce flatfish bycatch.

Many vessels were unable to harvest the pounds associated with their Closed Area I trips during fishing years 2012 and 2013. The new measures allow unused pounds associated with these trips to be harvested by those full-time vessels in Closed Area I when it reopens in the future.

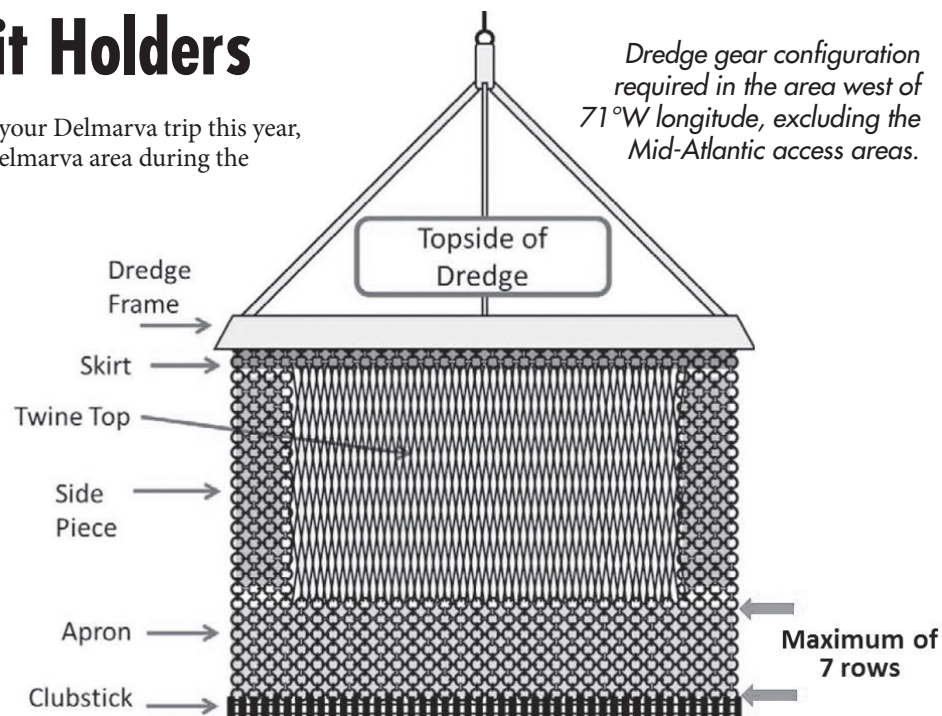
NOAA Fisheries will be sending letters to each permit holder in the fall to confirm the amount of unharvested pounds that his/her vessel had in Closed Area I during fishing years 2012 and 2013.

In response to uncertain projections of scallop sizes and densities in Delmarva, full-time vessels now have the option to exchange one 12,000-pound Delmarva trip for five open area DAS. This is an exchange of a single Delmarva trip for five DAS.

If you would like to take your Delmarva trip this year, you must declare into the Delmarva area during the 90-day opening that runs from June 16 to Sept. 14. If you break your Delmarva trip in the last 60 days of the area's opening – July 17 through Sept. 14 – you can carry the trip over and fish it in the first 60 days of FY 2015, which runs from March 1, 2015 through April 29, 2015.

Finally, these measures implement a gear change intended to reduce flatfish bycatch by all scallop dredge vessels. If you are fishing west of 71°W longitude anywhere other than an access area, you must have a maximum of seven rows of rings in the apron between the twine top and the clubstick year-round (see figure).

You can find more details on this measure in the



Framework 25 final rule, which is available online at [www.nero.noaa.gov/sfd/sfdscallop.html](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/sfd/sfdscallop.html).

For more information, call Travis Ford, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at (978) 281-9233 or e-mail him at [travis.ford@noaa.gov](mailto:travis.ford@noaa.gov).

## Fishermen and science

*Continued from page 4*

Depending on the type of project supported, the research may be carried out on commercial vessels during the harvest of the quota, separately from the harvest of the quota, or a combination of these.

RSA project focus areas have included: monitoring, habitat science, conservation engineering, resource health, resource dynamics, management strategies, fishing effects, dockside monitoring, bycatch, discard mortality, tagging, and age and growth.

RSA research has led to the development of new escape vents for the black sea bass pot fishery. It also provides annual area management information for the sea scallop fishery, supports monkfish biological and bycatch reduction research, and has helped support the collection of important nearshore trawl survey data.

Notices of Federal Funding Opportunities for the RSA programs include detailed information on current research priorities and are posted on the Federal grant system website at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and on Council and NCRP websites and distributed through e-mail lists.

All applications for RSA grants are submitted through the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) site and are reviewed to determine their technical quality and contribution to management before awardees are selected. Because applications must include a fully detailed research proposal and budget, it is recommended that industry members interested in participating in or developing an RSA project team up with an experienced researcher to develop their proposal.

Past RSA projects, research organizations, and advice on developing a research proposal can be found on the NCRP website at [www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch) where you also can sign up to receive notices of funding opportunities and other NCRP news.

### Scallop RSA awards

The NCRP recently announced the 2014-2015 Scallop RSA grantees. Thirty-one researchers from 14 different organizations were awarded research grants focused on Atlantic sea scallops, the nation's highest-valued single species commercial fishery. The researchers will be working on 16 projects worth just over \$16.5 million, the largest RSA program award total to date.

Award recipients are located in Massachusetts, Maine, Delaware, and Virginia and include universities, non-profit research and education foundations, a fish hatchery, commercial fishing vessels and businesses, and a state fisheries agency.

In 2013, 18 researchers from seven different institutions were awarded scallop RSA quota worth just over \$12.5 million for 14 projects, and, in 2012, researchers from five institutions were awarded just over \$11.5 million in quota for 13 projects.

Including those for 2014/2015, just over \$86 million in sea scallop allocation has been awarded, and 113 research set-aside projects have been conducted since the program began in 2000.

The research results will be used to: improve information on sea scallop recruitment and mortality; assess the impacts of ocean acidification and warming on scallop shells and meat weights; assess the abundance and distribution of scallops in several rotational management areas; develop fishing gear that reduces bycatch of flatfish and sea turtles; and utilize new technologies for better sampling and monitoring of sea scallop populations and their habitats.

A complete list of projects and award recipients may be found on the NCRP website at [www.nefsc.noaa.gov/](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/)

## VMS Requirements for Some MSB Vessels Start Sept. 1

**N**ew Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirements for limited-access mackerel and longfin squid/butterfish moratorium permits go into effect on Sept. 1.

If your vessel was issued a Tier 1, 2, or 3 limited-access mackerel permit or a longfin squid/butterfish moratorium permit, you will be required to install and operate a VMS by Sept. 1 of this year and comply with all VMS reporting requirements in port and at sea.

When you intend to take a mackerel or longfin squid trip, you must submit a VMS trip declaration and then submit daily VMS catch reports. More details about this requirement and VMS restrictions are available online at [www.nero.noaa.gov/nr/2014/March/14smdamend14phl.pdf](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nr/2014/March/14smdamend14phl.pdf).

Eligible vessel owners/operators who have purchased a VMS unit to comply with this new requirement may be eligible for reimbursement for the purchase price of up to \$3,100. Reimbursement for VMS units is available on a first come, first served basis.

More information on the VMS reimbursement program is available on our website at [www.nero.noaa.gov/vms](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/vms) under the "Reimbursement" tab and on the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission's website at [www.psmfc.org](http://www.psmfc.org) under the "Programs" tab. Or call the VMS Support Center at (888) 219-9228.

[coopresearch](mailto:coopresearch). Please e-mail Cheryl Corbett at [Cheryl.Corbett@noaa.gov](mailto:Cheryl.Corbett@noaa.gov) for more information on this and other RSA programs.



# The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR